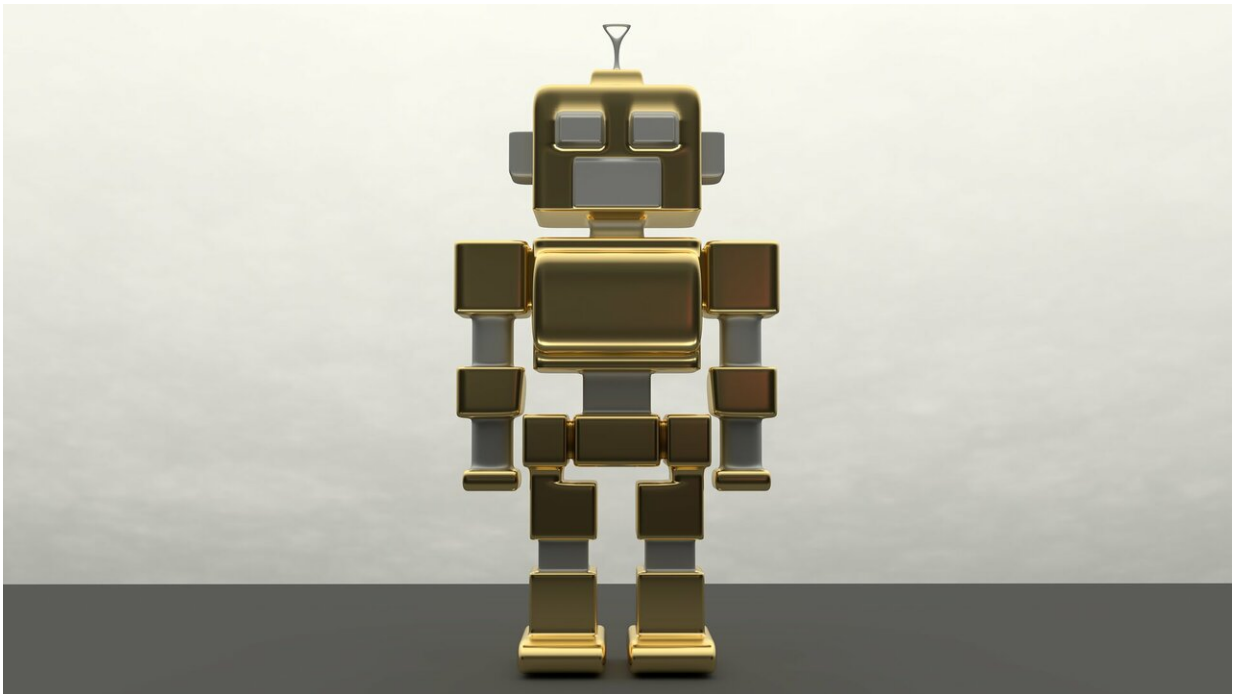


# Adults, not children, prefer friendly looking robots

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Robots are occupying an increasingly prominent place in our society. How do we deal with this, and what is it that determines whether or not we trust these robots to carry out certain tasks and assume certain responsibilities? Sari Nijssen investigated the situations in which adults and children are inclined to ascribe human characteristics to a robot, and what consequences this has for our behavior. It seems that both adults

and children are equally inclined to treat robots as humans. Nijssen will receive her Ph.D. at Radboud University on 15 November.

When are we willing to share our prized possessions with a robot? Would we rescue a robot from a collision, and would we trust that same robot if it had to rescue us? Sari Nijssen asked these questions and presented other [moral dilemmas](#) to the participants in her research, and looked at the factors that prompt people to trust smart apparatuses and artificial intelligence or not. "This showed that, in comparison to [children](#), it's more important to adults that a robot looks human," explains Nijssen. "However, it turns out that children feel that it's important that a robot expresses [human emotions](#) and has human thoughts."

## **Children vs adults**

Nijssen: "Previous research has already shown that people are capable of attributing human characteristics to robots. But this research study is the first time that we've looked at the differences between children and adults in this respect. We're also looking at various forms of anthropomorphism: Do emotions develop because a robot looks human, or because it behaves like a human being?"

Surprisingly enough, the appearance of the robot was not important to children; it was its behavior that played a more important role. During an experiment, children were more willing to share their stickers with a robot if they thought that it exhibited human behavior; the robot's appearance seemed to have little bearing on the situation. Nijssen: "Now that [young children](#) are increasingly surrounded by robots, the research study shows that the way in which we give context to these robots is significant. If you don't take the time to teach your children about robots, you run the risk that a child will suddenly start sharing their toys with a smart vacuum cleaner."

## Context plays an important role

Context also played an important role in both groups. For instance, adults were more inclined to rescue a robot that had a human appearance, but when it came to robots having to save a human life, this created distrust. Nijssen: "This shows that a human appearance may sometimes form an obstacle for the robot. You should use a robot for the purpose for which it was developed. For example, when it comes to surgical assistance during an operation, you don't want to be assisted by an apparatus that has clumsy social capacities; in such a case, it's better to rely on faceless intelligence. As for schools, it's important that robots not only appear to be competent but that they're also sociable."

Robots are now regularly being used to take over tasks. And they are not only being used for physically demanding or complex work, such as that which is carried out in hospitals or factories, but they are also increasingly being used in the type of social work that is carried out in schools and nursing homes. "It's important that we continue to think about this issue: what place should we give robots in our society, and what impact will this have on the social connections that we make with each other? This research study has shown that the way in which a [robot](#) is presented to us has important consequences for how we deal with these types of situations."

Provided by Radboud University

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